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COLLEGE COURSES IN PUBLIC SPEAKING¹

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In presenting the subject assigned me I shall offer an ideal course which only a few of our colleges and universities can give at the present time; but let us hope that the standard set is one that all colleges and universities shall strive to attain.

I am satisfied that much of the lack of appreciation of our work is due to failure on the part of teachers of public speaking to offer a strong scientific, cultural, and inspirational course. Many of these teachers, without any knowledge of the principles of public speaking, accept college positions, and are content to settle down to the dreary level of a "coach," having no preparation for the higher work of an instructor. Nor are these teachers alone to blame; college and university faculties and boards are equally culpable, in choosing for instructors those who may have had merely some success as recitationists or as intercollegiate orators or debaters; or those who hold, perchance, the diploma of some isolated school of expression bearing the name of its founder, owner, and president, the mainstay of the instructional force. Many of these special schools are wholly unable to offer the kind or grade of work necessary to meet college requirements. Yet many high schools and colleges, feeling the demand for at least some work in this line, hire unfit applicants, and, of course, the work is not a success.

Let us see what a thorough course in public speaking should consist of. For the sake of clearness we may number these courses. The primary object is to add to the student's power by giving him a voice, a method, and a manner which will be an improvement on that with which he starts. To train merely by imitation often defeats the very end sought, and unfortunately the student's very faults are often thus exaggerated.

¹ A paper read before the Public-Speaking Section of the National Council of Teachers of English, Chicago, Illinois, November 28, 1913.

Course 1. Elocution.—This should be a thorough study of the fundamental principles which form the broad foundation of the philosophy of expression. This course not only gives a thorough knowledge of the science of elocution, but it furnishes practical training in the basic principles of expressive power. It deals with man's triune nature; a study and development of the vocal organs and muscles; respiration; vocal culture; emphasis; tone-color; a study and drill in the vocal elements, time, quality, force, and pitch; technique and practical application of the elements of action; conception of gesture; actional composition; reading and recitation of illustrative extracts; and memoriter recitation of entire selections by each member of the class. This course, dealing with basic principles, should be mastered as a preparation for the succeeding courses, and for all forms of public speaking. The time required is three hours a week through one college year.

In this connection, let me say that I can find no cause for the criticism of the term "elocution," save that which grows out of ignorance or pedagogic cowardice. I pity the man who is afraid to say the word "elocution." Elocution is as essential to the whole course of public speaking as grammar or rhetoric is to the whole course in English. And I am convinced that much of the failure on the part of the teachers of public speaking is due to the fact that they themselves have never mastered the principles of elocution. Indeed, I doubt seriously if some of the teachers present could stand a passing examination upon that subject. I think you will agree that to add to the student's power is a better pedagogic method than to drill him in his faults, or by imitation. This can be done only by a mastery of the principles of expression.

After the broad foundation of elocution has been laid, the student then should decide whether he wishes to pursue a course leading to interpretation of the thoughts of others, or to the broad field of original public speaking. Suppose we consider the latter branch of the subject first. We should then have:

Course 2. Argumentation and Debate.—This course consists of lectures, text-study, collateral work, brief-drawing, and debates. It is designed to give the student greater power in deductive and inductive reasoning, and to make him alert in the oral formation of his constructive and destructive judgment on the leading questions of the day. He is required to make a careful theoretical study of the nature of argumentation, analysis, evidence, and refutation, and to give a practical presentation of them in the rhetorical and vocal forms of persuasion. Frequent class debates are held under the closest criticism of the instructor in charge, and ample opportunity is offered for the development of

the thinking and forensic abilities of the class members. This course requires two hours a week throughout the year, and the class should be limited in number so that much individual training can be given. It should be elaborated into practical work in inter-class, inter-society, or intercollegiate debates, with much practice in rebuttal and team-work, with all the stimulus connected with an actual contest for the decision of judges.

Course 3. Parliamentary Usage.—This deals with the ethics and management of public speaking. Some lectures on deliberative and legislative bodies and the general principles of parliamentary procedure and practice are given in the early part of the semester, together with a theoretical study of the textbook. The class is then organized into various societies, conventions, committees, courts, legislatures, congresses, parliaments, and other deliberative assemblies, into which appointed speakers introduce nominations, motions, resolutions, bills, and other measures, and discuss questions of the day under parliamentary conditions and criticism. Students take turns in presiding over these bodies. The course is a practical drill in parliamentary debate and legislation, and is intended as an incentive and aid to the work of the college literary societies as well as for its forensic use in public life. This course requires two hours a week for one semester, allowing two hours' credit, but there should be an additional meeting each week for special practice.

Course 4. Oratory.—This course gives instruction in all forms of public speaking other than debate, and deals not only with the delivery but with the composition, structure, style, logic, thought, purpose, and message of the speech. There should be lectures, recitations, and prescribed reading; individual vocal and actional drill to meet particular needs; forensic deportment; lectures on extemporization, kinds, construction, and qualities of discourse, and commemorative, panegyric, and national oratory. Some study should be given to the life and methods of ancient and modern orators. Each student is required to prepare and deliver extempore speeches, topical speeches, lectures, addresses, orations, and critiques. This course requires two hours a week for one semester, and the class should be limited to twenty students.

Not only should the student be prepared to make the various kinds of speeches suitable to various occasions, but he should form a systematic method of criticism that he may profit by the faults of others, and correct his own. This leads us to:

Course 5. Rhetorical Criticism.—In this should be given lectures, recitations, collateral reading, and speeches; lectures on the laws of rhetorical and dramatic criticism, dramatic and oratorical technique, the sources of power in oratory, public occasions, the kinds and conditions of audiences, and a study of the history of oratory. Topical speeches and original orations on assigned subjects, and written and oral criticisms are required of each member of the class. Each speech is reviewed or abstracted by class members appointed for

that purpose in due order and succession, and criticized by class members and by the instructor in charge. To this course should be given two hours a week for one semester, giving a credit of two semester hours.

As a culmination for the original public-speaking branch of the work, the student should take:

Course 6. Oratorical Seminar.—This is an advanced course in the study and appreciation of the literature of oratory and the oratory of literature. Reading and analysis of the great orations of the world with a view to their bearing upon the great problems of life and history. Each student must make reports of collateral reading and research work, and present abstracts of the orations studied, showing their style, construction, main thought, purpose, and results achieved. This course requires one hour a week through an entire year. Near the close of it each member is required to hand in a constructive essay on the various phases of the oratory of the present time.

Having mapped out the general plan for original public speaking, we now take up the special courses for interpretation, which may be taken in conjunction with the work named, or independent of it, or even after its completion. We will continue the order of our notation, and, building upon the basic principles of elocution, we would now offer:

Course 7. Literary Analysis and Interpretation.—In this would be given lectures, recitations, and prescribed reading; vocal culture and drill in action, indicated by the individual needs of class members; rostrum business; sight-reading, Bible- and hymn-reading; study of poetry as a representative art; technical training in rendition; analysis and study of readings, recitations, and impersonations; criticism upon each student's rendition from memory of four selections, differing in style and including narrative, heroic, oratorical, and dramatic selections entire, and scenes from the modern dramas and from Shakespeare. This class should be limited in number to not more than twenty-five, no two of whom are allowed to give the same single selection or take the same part in the dramatic scenes, but each student is required to give an expressional reading of all the selections and scenes rendered by the other members of the class. While this course is placed in the interpretative class, it is almost as essential to students wishing to specialize in original public speaking. The course requires at least three hours a week for one semester.

Course 8. Shakespeare.—In this course also there should be lectures, recitations, and prescribed reading; technical drill in voice and action indicated by the interpretative necessities of the play studied; lectures on dramatic technique, dramatic criticism, history of the drama, and on the great dramatists; analysis and study of character, plot, and incident of one of Shakespeare's

plays together with a careful expressional reading of the entire play and memoriter rendition of the principal scenes. Whenever the excellence of the class work warrants, a full production of the play with elaborate costumes and other stage accessories should be given as one of the college public events. This course requires three hours a week for one semester, and could very profitably be elaborated into one year's work, especially for those who have done meritorious work in the first semester, and wish to continue the advanced study of an additional play, seeking a fuller interpretation of its language and characters. Not more than two plays should be studied and presented in the entire year, which would aggregate a college credit of six semester hours.

Let me say that the foregoing course should be preceded by all that is usually given of Shakespeare in the regular English course. Some years ago, when I was connected with the Ohio State University, I declined to accept students for interpretative Shakespeare who had not had previously a full study of the plays selected with the professor of English literature. It will be observed that we approach the subject from the standpoint of interpretation, and it has been the usual experience of students that this viewpoint develops many revelations of great value.

Following next, and corresponding to the oratorical seminar, there should be given:

Course 9. Interpretative Seminar.—This course is designed to enrich the mind of the student with those great pieces of interpretative literature which find their fullest appreciation through vocal and actional expression. It is a search for the best in story, novel, poem, or drama, which lends itself especially to speech-art conditions. The main principles of dramatic structure are studied in this course and applied in original adaptation and dramatization of standard literature. Each student is required to make reports upon research reading and to give abstracts of the characters, plot, incidents, purpose, language, and style of the literature studied. This course requires one hour a week for recitation throughout the year, with an unusual number of hours for preparation and research.

As a culmination to the whole course we offer:

Course 10. Normal Methods.—This course is offered for the preparation of teachers of elocution, oratory, debate, interpretative and dramatic art, oral English, and literature. It is a liberal course in expressive pedagogy and has for its aim the acquirement of the best methods of teaching all branches of expression. Each member is required to give didactic instruction to the other members of the class, to illustrate by voice and action all the principles involved, and to give lectures on the various phases of public speaking under the criticism

of the class and the instructor in charge. With a view to gaining greater knowledge of the history and the literature of expression, a course of parallel reading from standard works on elocution, oratory, and the drama is pursued. Each student is required to give an abstract or digest of two assigned volumes and furnish duplicate copies for record. In this course a thesis is prepared, representing diligent research, close investigation, wide reading, and original treatment of some subject germane to the course. This thesis should show such a setting-forth of past and present theories and methods, together with such clear deduction and practical formulation for guidance of students of oratory, debate, oral interpretation, the drama or dramatic art, as shall prove a genuine contribution to the literature of expression. Full reports of work done and investigation proposed should be required. The whole normal course represents three hours a week through the year or a credit of six semester hours.

I realize that the whole course that I have offered is somewhat ideal, and yet it is eminently practical, for I have not named a course that we are not giving at the present time at the Ohio Wesleyan University. Let me say further that full credit is given, hour for hour, for all of this work on the undergraduate and on the postgraduate degrees. In the school of oratory, with which I am connected, additional work is given, making 30 hours on the undergraduate degrees, and 32 hours for which the university gives the postgraduate degree of Master of Arts.

Let me say, in conclusion, that any college or university maintaining a department of public speaking worthy of the name should offer not less than Courses 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8. And let us hope that the day is not far distant when this important educational method shall be universally recognized, and as much credit given to the interpretation of thought as we have for centuries past given to the translation of thought in the study of ancient and modern languages.